

CHAPTER 31

PARTHIAN WRITINGS AND LITERATURE

No Parthian literature survives from the Parthian period in its original form. The only works of any length which exist in the Parthian language were composed under Sasanian rule. For the literature of older times we are dependent on Middle Persian redactions, or even on Persian and Georgian versions of these, to give at second or third remove some impression of the nature and scope of what has been lost.

One reason for the scale of the loss is presumably that Parthian literature, both religious and secular, was oral, composed and transmitted without the use of books. The Parthians had, however, their own distinctive system of writing, attested from the beginning of the 1st century B.C., a development evidently of the chancellery script of the Achaemenians. This script was in origin Aramaic, and had been used under the Achaemenians to write Imperial Aramaic, the administrative language of their empire. Under the less firmly unified rule of the Seleucids and Parthians a number of regional forms of this script developed, of which five have been identified, namely that of the Parthians themselves, that of the Persians in the south-west (which came to be called Pahlavī), that of Median Āzarbāijān in the north-west (attested by the solitary gravestone at Armazi) and those of the Khwārazmians and Sogdians in the north-east.¹ All these regional scripts show the same development, namely that they were used to write, not Imperial Aramaic, but instead the various local Iranian languages, with a number of fossilized Aramaic words serving as ideograms. This development took place slowly, with a gradual use of more and more Iranian words, so that Aramaic with Iranian elements imperceptibly changed into Iranian with Aramaic ones. This change perhaps originated in the Parthian chancellery, and was imitated regionally, each area developing independently not only a characteristic style of writing, but also a distinctive stock of Aramaic words used ideographically. There evolved also gradually, for greater clarity, a general use of Iranian inflections with these ideograms, to indicate

¹ These scripts are treated extensively, with full references down to 1958, by Henning "Mitteliranisch" pp. 21 ff, 30-40.

their syntactic function. This system developed fully only in Pahlavi, which had a longer history than any of the other scripts.

To learn to write the Middle Iranian languages by these ideogram-matic systems must have needed much application, and the skill was probably left in the main to the professional scribe, who used it, as far as is known, only for practical ends. The oldest surviving examples of his work are from the Parthian city of Nisā (now within Soviet territory, on the southern border of Turkmenistan).¹ Excavations here have produced almost three thousand ostraca, most of them concerned with the delivery of wine from local vineyards, the issue of food to the officials concerned, inventory lists, registers etc. The contents of these ostraca are thus restricted and monotonous. Nevertheless they yield a number of Parthian common nouns and proper names, some of the latter decidedly Zoroastrian in character, which accords with the fact that this Nisā material provides the oldest evidence which there is for the use of the Zoroastrian calendar. Some twenty of the ostraca bear month and day names from this calendar, and a valuable few have also the year, reckoned evidently according to the Arsacid era. The ostraca belong to a period from c. 100 to 29 B.C., and most, it seems, to between 77 and 66 B.C. The Iranian element in the vocabulary was still small at this stage.²

The use of the Parthian language and script is next attested at a place far removed from Nisā, namely the village of Avroman in the south-west of Iran.³ Here were found in a sealed jar inside a cave three parchments, each relating to the sale of the same piece of property, namely half a vineyard. The two older documents are in Greek, and dated, by the Seleucid era, to 88/87 and 22/21 B.C.⁴ The third, which is the worst-preserved, is in Parthian script and language (although still with a very high proportion of Aramaic ideograms),⁵ and is dated by the Arsacid era to the middle of the 1st century A.D.⁶ There are only

¹ See the bibliography for the various publications of Diakonov and Livshits. The whole material has not yet been published.

² This has led Vinnikov and Sznycer (see bibliography) to argue that the language of the ostraca is still Aramaic with Parthian words in it, rather than Parthian with Aramaic ideograms; but Diakonov and Livshits maintain that this interpretation cannot be upheld if the whole material is considered, and not merely selected pieces.

³ On the exact location see Edmonds, "The Place-names of the Avroman Parchments".

⁴ See Minns, "Parchments of the Parthian Period".

⁵ See Nyberg, "The Pahlavi Documents"; Herzfeld, *Paikuli* I, 83; Henning, "Mittel-iranisch", pp. 28-30.

⁶ See Henning, p. 29. Henning dated the document precisely to between 7 Jan. and 5 Feb. A.D. 53; but this exact calculation was based on the assumption that the Arsacid calendar had a solar year of 365 days, which does not appear to have been the case; see M. Boyce, "On the Calendar of Zoroastrian Feasts", *BSOAS* xxxiii (1970), 515ff.

eight lines of text, partly filled by the date and witnesses' names. There is also a barely legible Parthian endorsement on the back of one of the Greek documents.

At about this same time there appeared legends in Parthian script on Arsacid coins, of which the oldest have been assigned to the first part of the reign of Vologeses I (A.D. 51-8).¹ These are as brief as possible, i.e. *wl* for *wlgīy*, the king's name. Longer legends are found in the next century, notably *'ršk wlgīy MLKYN MLK'* "Arsaces Vologeses, king of kings",² found on copper coins assigned to Vologeses III (c. A.D. 148-92). These same words occur on a little stone plaque of unknown provenance, which bears a fine portrait-bust, presumably of this king.³ In the vassal kingdom of Elymais (in south-east Khūzistān) a coinage was issued in the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D., of which the larger tetradrachms bore Aramaic legends, but the smaller copper coins had ones in what appears to be Parthian script.⁴ Some half a dozen gem-stones also exist with Parthian lettering on them, probably to be attributed to the last centuries of Parthian rule, or even a few decades later.⁵

A number of rock-carvings of the Parthian period have been found in Khūzistān, in which figure-sculptures are accompanied by brief identifying inscriptions in the local type of Aramaic language and script;⁶ but very little rock-carving survives from the Parthian period with Parthian inscriptions. The oldest known Arsacid sculpture, that of Mithradates II (123-87 B.C.) at Bisutūn, is accompanied by a short Greek inscription, as is another beside it portraying Gotarzes II (A.D. 40-1, 43-51).⁷ At Sarpul in the Zagros mountains, however, a carving of a horseman and a man on foot is accompanied by a few badly preserved lines in Parthian identifying them;⁸ and at Susa a tomb-stele has been discovered, whose six-line inscription declares that it was set up by Ardavān V in A.D. 215 for his satrap there.⁹

In the frontier town of Dura a small quantity of Parthian material

¹ See Wroth, *BMC Parthia*, pl. xviii (16), xxix (1); Henning, "Mitteliranisch", p. 40.

² Wroth, pl. xxxv (3-6).

³ See Ghirshman, *Iran*, p. 280 and pl. 33a.

⁴ See Henning, "Tang-i Sarvak", pp. 163-6, with references.

⁵ For references and discussion see Bivar, "A Parthian Amulet", pp. 512ff.

⁶ See Henning, *loc. cit.*; W. Hinz, "Zwei parthische Felsreliefs"; Bivar and Shaked, "The Inscriptions of Shīmbār".

⁷ See Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran*, pp. 54-7. [Cf. pp. 43ff on Gotarzes.]

⁸ See Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien*, pl. xxv, and *Paikuli* 1, 66, 84; Henning, "Mitteliranisch", p. 41, who hazards that the figures may represent Mithradates IV, overthrown by Vologeses II (or III?); Gropp, "Die sasanidische Inschrift von Mishkinshahr".

⁹ See Ghirshman, "Un Bas-relief d'Artaban V"; Henning, "Tang-i Sarvak", p. 176, and "Mitteliranisch", p. 41.

has been found, notably a scrap of fine parchment bearing the formal opening of a business letter, written probably about the mid 3rd century A.D.¹ This letter is of especial interest, because its formulas of greeting can be traced back to Aramaic usages employed under the Achaemenians in the 5th century B.C. – an admirable testimony to Parthian scribal conservatism.² There are also a few Parthian ostraca from Dura. Two of these are well preserved and contain lists of names, possibly pay-lists.³ On the walls of some buildings there are Parthian graffiti, mostly no more than a single line. Of two in the Temple of Zeus Megistos⁴ one contains a date in the Seleucid or Babylonian era, corresponding accordingly to A.D. 211 or 212.⁵ Others are to be found in the Synagogue, and one in the House of Frescoes.⁶

Apart from one or two inscriptions on small objects,⁷ this is the pathetic total of written Parthian from the Parthian period; but such as it is, it establishes the origin and character of the Parthian system of writing, and indicates the range of its uses. It also shows that the Parthian scribes, inheriting their craft from Achaemenian predecessors, remained uninfluenced by the use of written Greek in Seleucid Iran, which continued in Bactria and the Greek cities of Parthia itself. Doubtless a number of Parthian scribes mastered the Greek language and script; but the two systems evidently existed side by side with little effect on one another (except in some minor technical points).

The same thing appears true of literature. Greek literature was undoubtedly to some extent known and even cultivated by the Parthians; but it does not appear to have influenced their own traditional types of composition. These existed evidently without benefit of writing, and therefore independently of the scribes. In such oral traditions the author is also necessarily a transmitter, who is required both to study his craft and to commit to memory a great quantity of subject-matter, so that the knowledge and achievements of previous generations are not forgotten. The need to spend much time in learning acts as one of several stabilizing factors, and an oral literature often has

¹ See Henning, "Three Iranian Fragments", pp. 414–15; Harmatta, "The Parthian Parchment from Dura-Europos".

² See Henning, review of Altheim and Stiehl, p. 478 with n. 1; this letter is reproduced, with all the other Parthian written material from Dura, by R. N. Frye in *CIR* (see bibliography).

³ See Henning, *op. cit.*, p. 478 (= ostraca 4 and 5).

⁴ See Henning, "Mitteliranisch", pp. 41–2.

⁵ See Geiger, "The Middle Iranian Texts", pp. 314–17.

⁶ Frye in *CIR*, no. 20.

⁷ See, e.g., Herzfeld, *Paikuli*, II, 193a.

a unity over a long period, which is not necessarily broken by such minor barriers of speech as exist within a single family of languages. This seems true of pre-Muslim Iran, where a broad stream of literature appears to flow from Median and "Avestan" times down through the Seleucid and Parthian periods and on into the Sasanian one, to be weakened then by new conventions attaching to a developing written literature, disappearing finally in the early centuries of Islam.

The secular literature of Parthia appears to have been almost wholly in verse, sung, and accompanied by a musical instrument. It was cultivated professionally by the *gōsān*, who gave his name to the Armenian *gusan* and the Georgian *mgosanni*. The word occurs also in Mandaean and survives in Persian, a tribute to the popularity and influence of the Parthian minstrel-poet.¹ Nothing is known directly of the training of the *gōsāns*, but from their skill and achievements one can deduce that it was rigorous. As for their role in society, "the cumulative evidence suggests that the *gōsān* played a considerable part in the life of the Parthians . . . entertainer of king and commoner, privileged at court and popular with the people; present at the grave-side and at the feast; eulogist, satirist, story-teller, musician; recorder of past achievements, and commentator of his own times . . . As poet-musicians . . . the *gōsāns* presumably enjoyed reputation and esteem in proportion to their individual talents. Some were evidently the laureates of their age, performing alone before kings; others provided together choir or orchestra at court or great man's table; and yet others, it is plain, won a humble livelihood and local fame among peasants and in public places."²

Although much information can be gleaned about the *gōsāns*, especially from Armenian sources, pathetically little survives of their art. It is evident, however, that they played a major part in transmitting the tales of the Kayanians, the pagan ancestors of Zoroaster's patron Vištāspa, whose deeds are commemorated to the sixth generation (stretching back into a remote prehistoric time which had the characteristics of a true "heroic age"). Piety among Parthian princes and nobles, and perhaps claims by some of them to Kayanian descent, led evidently to these tales being sung still under their patronage by the *gōsān* (characterized as one "who proclaims the worthiness of kings

¹ See Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*", pp. 10-19; and further on the word *gōsān*, A. Tafazzoli, *Rāhnemā-ye ketāb* xi. 7 (Tehran, Oct. 1968), pp. 410-11.

² Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*", pp. 17-18.

and heroes of old").¹ Epic poetry was, moreover, still actively cultivated under the Parthians, with the deeds of living men being celebrated in the old heroic convention (which indeed lingered on, though weakening, through the Sasanian period, as the *Shāh-nāma* attests). The existence of a feudal society, whose leaders took an active part in battles, gave ample opportunity for heroic action; and the Parthian barons in their castles, the *dizbads*, must have provided generous patronage for contemporary as well as for traditional themes. At some stage, when these Parthian stories had in their turn been handed down for generations – presumably, that is, in the later Sasanian period – the different traditions became confused, and minstrels celebrated the deeds of Parthian princes at the courts of Kayanian kings.² It has been suggested that this was deliberately done at the instigation of scions of the great Parthian houses, to enhance their prestige under the Sasanians;³ but the manner in which it occurs suggests rather that the process was unconscious. Had the incorporation been deliberate, one would expect it to have been achieved with some circumstance and care. As it is, a group of Parthians, by no means evenly representing the "great houses",⁴ appears with dream-like abruptness at the court of Kai Kāūs; they remain, actively participating or providing a background of council, throughout the reigns of the succeeding Kayanians, and although most meet their deaths in fit heroic manner, one of the most glorious of them, Gōdarz, is not even formally dispatched, but fades unmarked from the scene. This strongly suggests, not a deliberate or politic grafting, but one of the simplifications characteristic of the later stages of a long oral tradition.⁵ In consequence of this process, when, probably in the 5th century A.D., the Sasanian priests drew on Parthian epic poetry for material for their great chronicle, the *Xwadāy-nāmag* or "Book of Kings", they unwittingly adopted Parthian traditions together with Kayanian ones, and so Gōdarz, Gēv and Bēžan, Milād and Farhād entered the Persian annals, unrecognized as Arsacids.⁶

¹ See *ibid.* p. 11; and cf. Boyce, "Zariadres and Zārēr", pp. 475–6.

² See Rawlinson, "Notes on a March"; Nöldeke, *Persische Studien*, II, 29–34, and *Das iranische Nationalepos*, pp. 7–9; Markwart, "Beiträge"; *Ērānšahr*, pp. 72, 74, and "Iberer und Hyrkaner", pp. 78–113.

³ See Nöldeke, *Persische Studien*; Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, p. 128; Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien*, p. 47, and "Die iranische Heldensage", p. 113.

⁴ See Coyajee, "The House of Gotarzes", pp. 222–3.

⁵ Boyce, "Kayanian Heroic Cycle", pp. 49–50.

⁶ Representing older Parthian Gōtarz[es], Wēw, Wēžan, Mihrdāt[es] and Frahāt [Phraates]. The Kayanian tradition is also partially preserved, but without such contaminations, in the Avestan *yasts*, priest and minstrel poet uniting in this respect to keep alive the memory of Vištāspa's ancestors. [Cf. pp. 390ff and 457ff.]

Another cycle which came to be closely interwoven with the Kayanian one was that of the Saka Rustam, so that tales of this pagan hero were also preserved in the *Xwadāy-nāmag*. The blending of Kayanian and Saka stories may well again be due to intermarriage, this time of Zoroastrian Parthian with invading Saka, leading to the cultivation of both epics by minstrels of united houses.¹ An independent fragment of the Rustam cycle is preserved in Sogdian of the Sasanian period.²

Parthian heroic poems are thus mainly known through Persian and Arabic redactions of the lost Middle Persian *Xwadāy-nāmag*, and notably through Firdausi's *Shāh-nāma*, which in style probably owes something directly to the old Iranian epic tradition, doubtless not yet wholly lost in the Khurāsān of his day. Only one short, mutilated fragment of the Kayanian epic survives in independent form, namely the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān*. This is a celebration of a great battle in the holy wars of Zoroastrianism, composed in Middle Persian but probably not written down until as late as the 9th century A.D. The fragment is in one of the unrhymed, slightly irregular stress-metres which characterize all Iranian poetry before the Arab conquest;³ and that there was once an older Parthian version is shown by Parthian words and phrases occurring in the Middle Persian text. (The two languages are close enough for such borrowings to remain as inconspicuous as are the dialect traces in the Homeric poems, or Anglian forms in the West Saxon of *Beowulf*.) The exploits of the Zoroastrian hero Zarēr were presumably first celebrated in the Avestan tongue, and passed thence into Parthian and in due course to the minstrels of Persia. (It seems likely that the Kayanian epic was known at least to some extent in Achaemenian Persia; but the evidence suggests that the heroic legends of this house were either not known in the south-west under the early Sasanians, or at least were not so well known there at that time as in Parthia.)⁴

Although the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān* must have been written down finally by a priest, it is wholly secular and heroic in spirit; and in style is

¹ On the similarities between the adventures of Rustam and the Kayanian Spendiyār see Spiegel, *Eranische Alterthumskunde*, I, 714ff, and "Awestā und Shāhnāma", p. 201; Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos*, pp. 47ff.

² See E. Yarshater, "Rustam dar Zabān-i Sughdī"; Sims-Williams, "Sogdian fragments", pp. 54-61. Tales of Rustam are told by the Armenian Moses of Khoren which are not to be found in the *Shāh-nāma*; see Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos*, p. 12. These too were presumably transmitted by the Parthian gōsān.

³ The metrical character of the text was established by E. Benveniste, "Le Mémorial de Zarēr". On the stress-metres of pre-Islamic Iran see Henning, "The Disintegration of the Avestic Studies".

⁴ See Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*", p. 12, n 2.

characterized by the fixed epithets, hyperboles and deliberate repetitions of oral epic. The poem has clearly lost some of its fire in being recorded, and the written text has suffered corruptions subsequently; but despite this, and the attrition of an immensely long oral transmission (probably over some 2,500 years),¹ there is still nobility of spirit and expression left, with worthy celebration of honour, courage, and a warrior's pride and skill.

In the *Ayādgār* the young prince Bastwar extemporizes a short and moving lament on the battlefield over his father's body. There are a number of other indications that in ancient Iran poetry was commonly improvised by persons of rank to express their emotions, of grief or joy, despair or love. For example, in the *Shāh-nāma* Isfandiār on his Fourth Course, resting in the wilderness by a spring, takes his guitar and sings a lament for his hard lot, condemned ever to wander and to fight. His singing attracts the witch whom he must overcome, and it is likely, therefore, that the account of it is as old as the story. The incident is closely reproduced in the Fourth Course of Rustam. Joyous improvisation is mentioned at the birth of Rustam himself, when all Sām's entourage "drank to the sound of the lyre, each joyfully uttered songs".² As well as this poetry for self-expression, minstrelsy for the delight or encouragement of others was widely cultivated by women. Singing girls are mentioned as commonly as dancers, and both accompanied the Parthian armies to war.³ Women's minstrelsy is often mentioned for the Sasanian period in the *Shāh-nāma*.

Although the heroic element still persisted in Parthian literature, there was evidently also some softening of tastes, at least towards the end of the period; for the romance of *Vīs u Rāmīn*, which survives in Persian and Georgian versions, has been convincingly derived from a Parthian original, once more through the medium of a Middle Persian redaction.⁴ The Parthian poem, thought to have been composed in the 1st century A.D., is concerned with Rāmīn (possibly a scion of the house of Gōdarz) and his unfading passion for his brother's wife Vīs, and hers for him. This romance, known in the west since 1864, has often been compared with that of Tristan and Isolde; but the undeni-

¹ The long war against the Xyōns is reduced to a single episode in the *Ayādgār*; see Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, 6. This abbreviation evidently took place during the centuries in which the story was transmitted orally after the compilation of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*.

² See Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*", p. 28, with references.

³ Plutarch, *Crassus*, § 32; see G. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy* (London, 1873), p. 409.

⁴ See Minorsky, "Vīs u Rāmīn"; Henning, "Tang-i Sarvak", p. 178, n2.

able likeness is presumably accidental, since "human fantasy . . . is not unlimited as regards situations in a three-cornered love".¹ Since *Vis u Rāmīn* survives only in derivative versions, it is impossible to judge the style of the original. The story is told at length, with many episodes and embroideries. Repetitiveness of incident, and wearisome prolongation of dialogue (once to five hundred verses) may well have developed in the course of transmission, for it seems that even the Middle Persian version was not fixed in writing until after the coming of Islam. Emotions are intensely depicted, but character and motives only superficially drawn; and the poem differs fundamentally from the older epic in its subordination of action to feeling. Battle and hunt, though still described, have receded into the background, and the story pursues its way in the enclosed atmosphere of court and castle, garden and moonlit orchard, dealing in magic and subterfuge, faith and faithlessness, like any medieval French romance.

In *Vis u Rāmīn* Zoroastrianism is a natural part of the fabric of life,² as is the Christian faith in the tales of western chivalry. As for the religious literature proper of Parthia, evidence is again regrettably scant. No part of the Avesta itself can be dated with certainty; but internal evidence suggests that the two latest of its extant books, the *Vidēvdād* (*Vendīdād*) and *Nirangestān*, were compiled, partly from older material, during the Parthian period. In these works the Graeco-Roman system of measures is used, "presumably introduced into Persia by the Macedonian conquerors".³ By this time Avestan is generally supposed to have become a dead church-language, and both works show a breakdown in its old inflectional system, although their usages are consistent enough to be perhaps compatible with an actual development of the language still at this time. In what part of the land their compilation took place is unknown. One Pahlavi text tells how Zoroastrian holy texts were transmitted orally in Sagistān (Sistān) after Alexander's conquest.⁴ Zoroastrian tradition ascribes to "the Arsacid Valaxš" (one of the three Vologeses) measures for preserving the Avesta and its *zand* (i.e. the commentary of the holy texts);⁵ and it is

¹ Minorsky, "*Vis u Rāmīn* (III)", p. 92.

² See H. Massé in the introduction to his French translation, pp. 12-13; and the remarks of von Stackelberg in Minorsky "*Vis u Rāmīn* (II)", p. 33, together with Minorsky's own observations, *ibid.* p. 22 with n. 1.

³ See Henning, "An Astronomical Chapter of the Bundahishn", *JR.AS* 1942, pp. 235ff.

⁴ Jamasp-Asana (ed.), *Pahlavi Texts* II, 25-6.

⁵ *Dēnkard*, ed. D. M. Madan, p. 412, ll. 5-11; tr. Zachner, *Zurvan*, p. 8.

possible that this involved the first writing down of the Avesta, in Parthian script. What Valaxš seems more likely to have achieved was simply the bringing together of the best oral traditions, and the establishing of an oral canon at diverse centres of priestly learning.

As well as the canonical Avestan texts, there was evidently a zand in Avestan, and also presumably one in contemporary Parthian, some of which may survive in translation in the existing Middle Persian zand. Some of this is demonstrably pre-Sasanian, but whether such passages are of earlier Middle Persian or of Parthian origin cannot be determined.

The priestly schools of the Parthian period evidently concerned themselves not only with the Avesta and its exposition, but also with antiquarian learning in general, and with wisdom-literature. Part of the gnomic sixth book of the Pahlavi *Dēnkard* appears to have an Avestan origin in the lost *Bariš Nask*, and must therefore have been transmitted through the Parthian period. Only one solitary piece of wisdom-literature survives, however, which has demonstrably a Parthian predecessor, and that is the *Draxt asūrig* "The Babylonian Tree", a Middle Persian verse-text with a few Parthian words remaining to show its ancestry.¹ The poem is about a contest over precedence between a date-palm and a goat; and though short it is difficult, with an unusual vocabulary and a riddling element. As well as being a contest work, this is also incidentally a catalogue poem, listing the qualities of tree and animal. It belongs, therefore, to wisdom-literature, being intended both to sharpen the wits and to give instruction.² The *Mādiyān ī Yoišt ī Fryān* is another riddling contest, this time between the pious Yoišt and the wicked Axt. It exists now only in Middle Persian, but the names of the contesters occur in the Avesta, and the work must have a long history.

Middle Persian specimens of mantic and prophetic literature, such as the *Ardā- Virāz-nāmag*, the *Zand ī Vahman Yašt* and the *Jāmāsp-nāmag*, all appear to derive from Avestan tradition; and the evident continuity of the Zoroastrian literature suggests that there must once have been Parthian versions of many of the texts which have come down to us in the Pahlavi books, in particular of those texts which belong to well-established categories of oral literature.³

¹ This was the first poem to be recognized in the Pahlavi MSS; see Benveniste, "*Draxt Asūrik*", and further literature in bibliography to chapter 32(a), p. 1389.

² Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature", p. 55.

³ An attempt has been made to define these categories as they are exemplified in the Zoroastrian literature; see *ibid.* pp. 31-3, 40-1, 48ff.

There must, moreover, have been other Iranian traditions, in addition to the Persian one, flourishing within the broad Parthian realms, with local schools of priestly learning and of minstrelsy. The gravestone at Armazi, the old capital of Iberia, shows that Median Āzarbāijān had its own form of ideogrammatic writing,¹ and this indicates a thriving culture in the ancient land of the Magi. The fact that under the Sasanians the holy places of Zoroastrianism were located, unhistorically, in Āzarbāijān suggests the strength of priestly power in this region. Of Median minstrelsy, attested of old by classical authors, there appears to be only one solitary remnant, namely the story of Zariadres and Odatis, recorded first by Chares of Mytilene, and attached eventually, it seems, in a degenerate form to the Kayanian cycle and the Zoroastrian Zarēr.² This association was probably made in the Sasanian period, when diverse materials were gathered together for the enrichment of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*. The predominant interest in the Zoroastrian north-east seems to have led, however, to the old Persian minstrel traditions themselves being ignored in Sasanian Pārs; and the only trace of them survives in the independent *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr*, where the early adventures of Cyrus the Great appear to have been transferred to the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, presumably under the influence of popular story-telling, persisting locally throughout the Parthian period.³

The fact that one of the few surviving texts with demonstrably a Parthian predecessor is called the "Babylonian Tree" is a reminder of how far Parthian rule reached to the west. In the apocryphal *Acts of St Thomas* (who is called, in one tradition, the "Apostle of Parthia") is to be found the beautiful "Hymn of the Pearl" or "Hymn of the Soul". This Syriac poem not only contains Parthian loan-words, but uses symbolism drawn from the circumstances of the Parthian empire, which in it represents the Kingdom of Heaven. God appears as the "King of kings", dwelling in "Warkan" (Hyrkania), and surrounded by satraps, his treasury enriched by "chalcedonies of India and opals of the realm of Kushān" (v. 7).⁴ At his summons come "the kings and chieftains of Parthia, and all the great ones of the East" (v. 38). The king sends his young son down to the wicked land of Egypt, there

¹ See Henning, "Mitteliranisch", pp. 38-40.

² See Boyce, "Zariadres and Zarēr", pp. 463-77.

³ See A. von Gutschmid, review of Nöldeke's translation of the *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr* ZDMG xxxiv (1880), 585-7 (= his *Kleine Schriften* III (Leipzig, 1894), 133ff).

⁴ Cited according to Bornkamm, "The Acts of Thomas", pp. 498-504.

to recover a lost pearl (i.e. the soul), and bring it back to Warkan. It has been argued that the origin of this poem should be sought in a pre-Christian Iranian gnosticism;¹ but what appears a stronger case has been made for its being a product of the Jewish-Christian community of Edessa,² which had Parthia for its mighty neighbour. The Parthian matter in the poem thus appears merely as the setting and outward trappings for the allegory. No precise date has been established for the work, but it must have been composed before the fall of the Arsacids.

The "Hymn of the Pearl" was evidently known to the prophet Mānī (A.D. 216–74?), who appears to have applied its symbolism in part to himself.³ Mānī, a Parthian of noble birth, was born under the rule of the last of the Arsacids;⁴ but he grew up in Babylon, in the extreme west of their domains, and his cultural background was accordingly largely Semitic. Those of his own writings which form the canon of Manichaean scriptures were all in Aramaic;⁵ but he encouraged their translation into other languages, and himself chose among his missionaries Parthians who knew their own language *and* script, to carry his teachings to the north-east of Iran.⁶ His religion was established in Parthia before the end of the 3rd century, and from there it later spread eastwards along the caravan routes across Central Asia, where Manichaean communities preserved many Parthian texts among their holy books, to be recovered in the present century by archaeologists.⁷

The Manichaean Parthian texts date accordingly from the latter part of the 3rd century A.D. down to perhaps the 10th century or a little beyond, and constitute by far the greatest amount of extant Parthian literature. These texts are all the more valuable because they are written in the clear and elegant "Manichaean" script, akin to

¹ By R. Reitzenstein, followed by G. Widengren and A. Adam (see bibliography). On Manichaean parallels with the "Hymn of the Pearl" see, further, A. Henrichs and L. Koenen, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* v (Bonn, 1970), 171–82.

² Most recently by G. Quispel, *Makarius*.

³ See Bornkamm, "The Acts of Thomas", pp. 436–7.

⁴ See H. Puech, *Le Manichéisme* (Paris, 1949), ch. 1; G. Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism* (London, 1961), ch. 2.

⁵ See G. Haloun and W. B. Henning, "The Doctrines of Mani", *Asia Major* III (1952), 204ff.

⁶ See the Middle Persian text M 2, V i – R ii published by Andreas and Henning, "Mitteliranische Manichaica II", *SPAW* 1933, pp. 302–3.

⁷ For details of the main expeditions see Boyce, *A Catalogue of the Iranian Manuscripts in Manichean Script* (where publication details are given of the individual fragments mentioned here). The chief collection of Parthian texts is to be found in Andreas and Henning, "Mitteliranische Manichaica III".

Syriac Estrangelo, which was generally used by Mānī and his followers. This form of writing gives a very fair idea of the sounds and syntax of Parthian in the 3rd century. Unfortunately very little of the Central Asian material is well preserved, and in the main it consists of single sheets and fragments of sheets. These yield passages of Parthian versions of a number of Mānī's own works, including his two long psalms.¹ The awkwardness of the prose texts (with anacoluthons and other clumsy constructions) is found also in the Middle Persian versions, which suggests that Middle Iranian prose had not evolved far enough by the 3rd century A.D. to be an adequate tool for theological exposition. (A recently discovered codex containing elegant Greek versions of some of Mānī's own words suggests that the stylistic difficulties do not lie in the Aramaic originals.)² Part of a long Parthian letter survives from the late 3rd century,³ whose fairly brief sentences and occasional difficulties of syntax bear out the impression given by the style of the translations.

The best period for Parthian prose appears to be approximately the 4th to 6th century. The use of Indian loan-words (due, it seems, to contact with Buddhists) helps to date these texts. Among them is an account of Mānī's death,⁴ which provides an interesting contrast with an earlier Middle Persian one representing probably an eye-witness's report. In the Parthian text, where the aim is not merely narrative, but also the evoking of emotion, the stylistic difference is striking. The syntax is varied, the vocabulary richer, and imagery effectively used.⁵ Some of the same imagery appears in a hymn on this theme, composed in A.D. 384. It is impossible to prove the dependence of one text upon the other; but in general it is likely that prose borrowed for its literary development from verse. The discipline of translation must have been another potent factor in developing Manichaean prose.⁶

Most of the Manichaean Parthian literature consists in fact of hymns, some of which have poetic quality. Formally there are three categories of verse-texts: the long verse-cycle, made up of a number of separate sections; the long but undivided chant of praise; and the short hymn, commonly but by no means always abecedarian.⁷ In the third category

¹ See Henning in Tsui Chi, "Mo Ni Chiao Hsia Pu Tsan", *BSOAS* XI (1943), pp. 216-7.

² See Henrichs and Koenen, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* V, 105.

³ Boyce, *Catalogue*, M 5815 II ("Mitteliranische Manichaica III", b. II).

⁴ *Ibid.* M 5569 ("Mitteliranische Manichaica III", c).

⁵ Boyce, "The Manichaean Literature in Middle Iranian", p. 72.

⁶ *Ibid.*; for the use of the Christian gospels in Parthian and Middle Persian texts see Sundermann, "Christliche Evangelientexte in der Überlieferung der iranisch-manichäischen Literatur".

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 74.

each verse or line (or, rarely, each significant word) begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. This convention belongs wholly to a written (in this case Aramaic) tradition. There is also a certain amount of Christian and gnostic imagery in the texts in general which is alien to Iran (e.g. the sea and fish and fishermen, the pearl, the crucified soul, the sleep of unconsciousness).¹ In the main, however, the poetic tradition is Iranian (the principles of Old and Middle Iranian versification were in fact deduced from these texts);² and part of the imagery appears traditional also, although the themes are new.

The latest Parthian texts show a falling off in literary merit, since these were evidently composed by Sogdian speakers in Central Asia, for whom Parthian was a dead church-language. The style of these texts (mostly short hymns and prayers) is accordingly imitative and conventional, and the vocabulary limited.

As well as the Parthian Manichaean material, there survive from the Sasanian period a small number of rock-inscriptions in Parthian language and script. The most important is the Parthian version of Shāpūr I's great trilingual inscription on the Ka'ba-yi Zardušt, at Naqš-i Rostam.³ This long text is beautifully preserved, having been below ground level for many centuries until its excavation in 1939. It is written in good idiomatic Parthian, and a Parthian scribe has set his name to it. Through comparison with the Middle Persian version, upon which it depends,⁴ it provides, therefore, excellent material to illustrate the differences between these two closely related languages and their systems of writing. The content of the inscription is of the greatest historical interest; and it is set out through sober statement and enumeration, without literary flourishes, a practical piece of work that fittingly crowns the long tradition of the Parthian scribes.

There is one other long royal inscription in Parthian, namely the Parthian version of the bilingual inscription on the monument at Paikuli.⁵ This was set up to celebrate the proclamation of Narseh, in

¹ For examples see Widengren, *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism*, *passim*.

² See Henning, "The disintegration". Some of the Turfan texts are written in a convention that shows how words were divided into syllables for singing: see bibliography, the articles of A. Machabey and H. C. Puech.

³ See M. Sprengling, *Third-century Iran* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 1-21; W. B. Henning, "Notes on the Inscription of Šāpūr I", in *Prof. Jackson Memorial Volume* (Bombay, 1954), pp. 40-54, and "The Great Inscription of Šāpūr I", *BSOS* ix (1939), 823-49, and "A Farewell to the Khagan", pp. 510-15. For the works by E. Honigsmann, A. Maricq and M. Rostovtzeff, see the bibliography for ch. 32 (c).

⁴ Against Sprengling's view that the Parthian version was the original one, see Henning, "A Farewell to the Khagan", pp. 513-15.

⁵ See Herzfeld, *Paikuli*; Henning, "A Farewell to the Khagan"; and Frye, "Remarks on Paikuli".

A.D. 293. The inscription is unfortunately badly preserved. Many of the great blocks of stone which formed the monument have been tumbled out of place, and some of those still in position are damaged. The text on a number of the fallen ones remains unpublished. The content of this inscription is again factual, the style objective and unadorned; but here in at least one small point the Parthian text seems to have been influenced by Middle Persian usage, which suggests the steady growth of dominance by the Sasanian scribes.¹

As well as his great inscription on the Ka'ba-yi Zardušt, Shāpūr I left two other occasional ones of fair length, carved both in Middle Persian and Parthian. These are at Hājjiābād² and Tang-i Borāq,³ both in the province of Fārs. These inscriptions, which are almost identical, both celebrate a champion arrow-shot made by the king.

Some private Parthian inscriptions of the Sasanian epoch have been found near Birjand in southern Khurāsān, which lies within the territory of Parthia proper. Some ten have been noticed, all short. The character of the script suggests that they are not all of the same period, but the only ones so far published, although undated, can be assigned to the early Sasanian period on the basis of the style of the figure-carving which one of them accompanies.⁴ In general the evidence suggests that the Parthian language and script continued in fairly general use in Iran until about the end of the 3rd century A.D., after which the script is no longer known, and the use of the language appears restricted to the local or the particular.

¹ See Boyce in G. Redard (ed.), *Indo-Iranica: Mélanges présentés à G. Morgenstierne* (Wiesbaden, 1964), p. 31.

² See Herzfeld, *Paikuli* I, 87-9; H. S. Nyberg, "Hādjiābād-inskriften" in K. Barr and H. Elikinde (eds.), *Ost og Vest: Afhandlinger tilegnede A. Christensen* (Copenhagen, 1945), pp. 62-74; Henning, "Mitteliranisch", p. 43n2.

³ G. Gropp in Hinz, *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen*, pp. 229-37; D. N. MacKenzie in Bivar, review of Hinz, *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen*, *BSOAS* xxxiii (1970), p. 404.

⁴ See Riḍā'i and Kiyā, "Guzāriš"; Henning, "A new Parthian Inscription".

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The abbreviations used in the bibliographies and footnotes are listed below.

<i>AA</i>	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i> (Beiblatt zum Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts) (Berlin)
<i>AAWG</i>	<i>Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen</i> (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Göttingen)
<i>AAntASH</i>	<i>Acta antiqua academiae scientiarum Hungaricae</i> (Budapest)
<i>AArchASH</i>	<i>Acta archaeologica academiae scientiarum Hungaricae</i> (Budapest)
<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i> (Brussels)
<i>Acta Iranica</i>	<i>Acta Iranica</i> (encyclopédie permanente des études iraniennes) (Tehran-Liège-Leiden)
<i>Aevum</i>	<i>Aevum</i> (Rassegna di Scienze Storiche Linguistiche e Filologiche) (Milan)
<i>AGWG</i>	<i>Abhandlungen der (königlichen) Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen</i> (Berlin)
<i>AI</i>	<i>Ars Islamica</i> = <i>Ars Orientalis</i> (Ann Arbor, Mich.)
<i>AION</i>	<i>Annali: Istituto Orientale di Napoli</i> (s.l. sezione linguistica; n.s. new series) (Naples)
<i>AJSLL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i> (Chicago)
<i>AKM</i>	<i>Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i> (Leipzig)
<i>AMI</i>	<i>Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran</i> (old series 9 vols 1929-38; new series 1968-) (Berlin)
<i>Anatolia</i>	<i>Anatolia</i> (revue annuelle d'archéologie) (Ankara)
<i>ANS</i>	American Numismatic Society
<i>ANSMN</i>	<i>American Numismatic Society Museum Notes</i> (New York)
<i>ANSNM</i>	American Numismatic Society Numismatic Notes and Monographs (New York)
<i>ANSNS</i>	American Numismatic Society Numismatic Studies (New York)
<i>Antiquity</i>	<i>Antiquity</i> (a periodical review of archaeology edited by Glyn Daniel) (Cambridge)
<i>AO</i>	<i>Acta Orientalia</i> (ediderunt Societates Orientales Batava Danica Norvegica Svedica) (Copenhagen)
<i>AOAW</i>	<i>Anzeiger der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften</i> (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Vienna)
<i>AOH</i>	<i>Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i> (Budapest)
<i>APAW</i>	<i>Abhandlungen der Preussischen (Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften</i> (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Berlin)
<i>Apollo</i>	<i>Apollo</i> (The magazine of the arts) (London)
<i>ArOr</i>	<i>Archiv Orientalní</i> (Quarterly Journal of African, Asian and Latin American Studies) (Prague)
<i>Artibus Asiae</i>	<i>Artibus Asiae</i> (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University) (Dresden, Ascona)

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- ASIR* *Archaeological Survey of India*. Reports made during the years 1862- by Alexander Cunningham, 23 vols. Simla-Calcutta, 1871-87.
- BASOR* *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (Baltimore, Maryland)
- BCH* *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* (Athens-Paris)
- BCMA* *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland, Ohio)
- BEFEO* *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* (Hanoi-Paris)
- Berytus* *Berytus* (archaeological studies published by the Museum of Archaeology and the American University of Beirut) (Copenhagen)
- BMQ* *British Museum Quarterly* (London)
- BSO(A)S* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies* (University of London)
- Byzantion* *Byzantion* (Revue Internationale des Études Byzantines) (Brussels)
- CAH* *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 12 vols; 1st edition 1924-39 (Cambridge) (Revised edition 1970-)
- Caucasica* *Caucasica* (Zeitschrift für die Erforschung der Sprachen und Kulturen des Kaukasus und Armeniens) 10 fascs (Leipzig, 1924-34)
- CII* *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (Oxford)
- CIIr* *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* (London)
- CRAI* *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* (Paris)
- CSCO* *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Paris, Louvain)
- CSEL* *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna)
- DOAW* *Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Vienna)
- East and West* *East and West* (Quarterly published by the Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Orient) (Rome)
- EI* *Epigraphia Indica* (Calcutta)
- Eos* *Eos* (Commentarii Societatis Philologiae Polonorum) (Bratislava-Warsaw)
- EPRO* *Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain* (Leiden)
- Eranos* *Eranos* (Acta Philologica Suecana) (Uppsala)
- ERE* *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, 13 vols (Edinburgh, 1908-21)
- GCS* *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig, Berlin)
- Georgica* *Georgica* (a journal of Georgian and Caucasian studies) nos. 1-5 (London, 1935-7)
- GJ* *The Geographical Journal* (London)

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- Historia* *Historia* (Journal of Ancient History) (Wiesbaden)
- HJAS* *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.)
- HO* *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, ed. B. Spuler (Leiden-Cologne)
- HOS* *Harvard Oriental Series* (Cambridge, Mass.)
- IA* *Iranica Antiqua* (Leiden)
- IJJ* *Indo-Iranian Journal* (The Hague)
- IndAnt* *The Indian Antiquary*, 62 vols (Bombay, 1872-1933)
- Iran* *Iran* (journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies) (London-Tehran)
- Iraq* *Iraq* (journal of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq) (London)
- JA* *Journal Asiatique* (Paris)
- JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (New York)
- JASB* *Journal (and proceedings) of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta)
- JASBB* *Journal of the Asiatic Society Bombay Branch* (Bombay)
- JCOI* *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute*, 29 vols (Bombay, 1922-35)
- JCS* *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* (New Haven, Conn.)
- JESHO* *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (Leiden)
- JHS* *Journal of Hellenic Studies* (London)
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- KZ* *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*, begründet von Adalbert Kuhn (Göttingen)
- LCL* Loeb Classical Library
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- TPS* *Transactions of the Philological Society* (London)
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- WVDOG* *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* (Leipzig)
- WZKM* *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* (Vienna)
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CHAPTER I

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